

Visualizing Labour: The Problem and a Case Study, *U.S.S.R. in Construction*

[Figure 1 here]

Consider an image of a working body, first published in 1932. An artificially neutral description of this image might run as follows. A man digging is photographed so that his left leg, torso and right arm form a single mass; this mass is the largest compositional element in the image and is made salient as a diagonal running from the bottom-right corner of the composition towards its centre. This diagonal is set against another formed by the haft of the spade the man wields. The man's right hand forms the crux of these diagonals. His right leg is bent and braced in anticipation of the thrust he is about to make; the plane angle formed by this leg is repeated in the man's left arm, which is about to exert the required force.

To describe the image in these terms is simply to register the photographer's work, the way a body and an object have been arranged to present elements which, conforming to a set of pictorial conventions, serve to dramatize an action. These conventions could be used to great effect and were deeply entrenched by 1932. Of course, they antedate photography. They were already established by the early seventeenth century when – to take another powerful example – a similar arrangement of bodies and objects was used by Peter Paul Rubens for *The Raising of the Cross* of 1610. Such arrangements have frequently recurred, with perhaps the most famous instance being Joe Rosenthal's photograph of 1945: *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*. Yet acknowledging the orchestrated drama of the photograph of the digging man does not mean that my description is an account of the visualising of labour. For where is 'labour' in the description? And what here, if anything, may be described as 'visualized'?

These two questions may serve to introduce what I see as a twofold problem. A first issue is the status of 'labour' and its relationship with 'work'. A second issue is the status of 'visualization', which, as the process of conceiving images, is distinct from the process of representing given entities. These two issues are rather entangled but I will nevertheless introduce the former before proceeding to the latter. A justification for this ordering is simply that there are different ways of defining labour and these may in turn give rise to different visualizations. After offering a rather schematic sketch of these matters, I will turn to a more detailed case study, centred on the man photographed digging, one Viktor Kalmikov, who was the subject of a photo-essay in the Soviet photo-journal *U.S.S.R. in Construction*.¹

Labour, abstraction, alienation

In the account offered by Marx, work and labour are distinct because they create different kinds of value. This is a simple formulation but it is by no means a simple matter to grasp its implications. These implications are unfolded by Marx in his first developed account of labour, that presented in the *Grundrisse*.² This account turns on the question: what kind of commodity is labour? Here is Marx's answer in barest outline. As with other commodities, labour has both an exchange value and a use value; the exchange value is the result of the exchange between capitalist and worker. Yet this prompts the further question: what is involved in this particular exchange? Turning to address this is itself a large step and what Marx came to recognise over the course of drafting the *Grundrisse* is that the exchange involves two processes, ones 'which are not only formally but also qualitatively

¹ There is of course an extensive literature on representations of work but it may already be clear that this essay is concerned with what might be described as a parallel set of issues. Griselda Pollock and Valerie Mainz have assembled an important collection of essays on work and work of the image and these volumes also contain a useful range of bibliographical references: see Pollock and Mainz (eds), *Work and the Image*, 2 vols. (Aldershot, 2000).

² This is to be found in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicholas (Harmondsworth, 1993), 266-341.

different'.³ When the worker sells his commodity, labour, there is a simple exchange in which the worker's time and energy are surrendered for a sum of money; this falls entirely within ordinary circulation. Yet when the capitalist obtains labour itself, as productive labour, 'he obtains the productive force which maintains and multiplies capital'.⁴ For labour, now more clearly understood as labour-power, has a specific use value *as* productive. This is crucial. Labour 'exists as capacity, as possibility' and thus 'it can be present only as the *living subject*', hence as the worker.⁵ Marx insists on this. Labour should be understood 'not as an object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value'.⁶

This has a number of consequences yet Marx concludes the first part of his account by drawing attention to the fact that: 'labour is not this or another labour, but *labour pure and simple*, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular *specificity* [*Bestimmtheit*], but capable of all specificities'.⁷ Labour is a force, one which may be directed to any number of different ends. It is in this sense that labour is abstract. For in principle force cannot be represented; it is 'evident only in its effects'.⁸ And as such 'labour' is distinct from 'work', for the latter has specific results, the creation of concrete use-values. Whilst labour creates a value which is only measured quantitatively, work creates value which may be measured qualitatively.⁹

From the abstract character of labour, Marx turns to alienation. He develops an account of the fundamental differences in the two processes of exchange between capitalist and worker. 'No matter that for the worker the exchange between capital and labour, whose result is the price of

³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 274.

⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 274.

⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 272, emphasis retained.

⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 296, emphases retained.

⁷ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 296, emphases retained.

⁸ David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London, 2003), 564.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, 1990), 138.

labour, is a simple exchange; as far as the capitalist is concerned it has to be a not-exchange. He has to obtain more value than he gives.’¹⁰ This is the unequal exchange of wage-labour.

What the worker exchanges with capital is his labour itself (the capacity of disposing over it); he *divests himself of it* [*entäussert sie*]. What he obtains as price is the *value* of his divestiture [*Entäusserung*]. He exchanges value-positing activity for a predetermined value, regardless of the result of his activity.¹¹

Workers alienate their labour. For Marx, the worker is able to do so on a daily basis because this ‘commodity exists in his vitality’.¹² This is the reason Marx has insisted on viewing the worker as a subject, ‘since the worker here confronts capital as a *worker*, i.e. as a presupposed perennial subject [*Subjekt*] ... he has to consume a certain quantity of food, to replace his used-up blood etc.’¹³ In self-reproduction, the worker is able to repeat the process of divestiture and ‘resume the exchange anew’.¹⁴ Here worker and capitalist constitute each other. The mature formulation Marx gives of this process in the first volume of *Capital* is as follows:

the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him; and the capitalist just as constantly produces labour-power, in the form of a subjective source of wealth which is abstract, exists merely in the physical body of the worker, and is separated from its own means of objectification and realisation; in short, the capitalist produces the worker as a wage-labourer.¹⁵

In this specific exchange between buyer and seller what the worker sells is the right of disposition over this labour-power; in this the worker alienates a definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain. Thus, under capital labour is at once subjective and alienated. In some respects, this is a

¹⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 322.

¹¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 322-3.

¹² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 323.

¹³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 323, emphasis retained, ellipsis added.

¹⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 323, emphasis retained.

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 716.

rather narrow and reductive definition but then one should not be surprised, for this is labour as conceived by capital.

Yet the foregoing allows me to present my initial problem in a more developed form. Labour is to be visualised; precisely because labour is abstract it cannot be portrayed or represented and may only be visualised. Yet this will hardly be a neutral operation for labour is alienated and the result of an unequal exchange. It follows that different visualizations will arise on either side of this exchange.

Among the most striking visualisations from the perspective of capital were those created by Etienne-Jules Marey and his collaborators.

[Figure 2 here]

These are examples of the visualizing of labour-force and they also serve to reveal what is repressed from the perspective of capital. In around 1870, Marey began making studies of locomotion and soon turned to photography, developing various techniques of chrono-photography to capture the human body in motion.¹⁶ Successive multiple exposures were developed as single prints and the results are strictly speaking visualizations because they are composites, discrete moments in time reassembled. Yet Marey's works are more than a series of arrested instances, as was the case for Eadweard Muybridge's celebrated photographs of a galloping horse. Instead, Marey's photographs are of a sequence of movements understood as a flow. The model to be photographed donned a costume of a similar colour to the backdrop against which he was to move; the costume was marked in such a way as to reduce limbs and torso to white lines. The result was a photograph in which the image of the physical body is replaced with the path of its motion; in abstracting motion from the body, Marey visualised the direction of muscular forces.

¹⁶ For a detailed account see Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)*, (Chicago and London, 1992).

Marey's formation was in medicine, and his principle scientific interest was physiology. However, others soon saw a range of applications for his work. For example, that abstracting motion could be a repression of the body in the service of capital was demonstrated in a collaboration between Marey and Charles Fremont of 1894. A photograph of smiths at the anvil was in turn abstracted by Fremont to produce a diagram showing not the body but only the trajectories of hammers landing blows.¹⁷ Here, the body is reduced to a machine, although perhaps with qualities of suppleness not found in machinery. There is, I think, a fantasy here, one which could be described as an extreme extension of the desire for efficiency. The fantasy is of a labour-force freed from the body, its appetites and its need for reproduction.¹⁸

Of course, there have been alternatives to this reductive visualization of labour and these have taken various forms. In those alternatives developed in Communist contexts it is possible to identify two key preoccupations: the attempt to imagine labour without reducing the body to force and the attempt to present the character of labour without merely reproducing conditions of exploitation. In short, the task was to overcome abstraction and alienation without abandoning the whole project of visualizing labour. Needless to say, this presented its own challenges. Nevertheless, as I shall show, in Soviet Union they were challenges which had to be met. From the adoption of the first Five-Year Plan in 1929, there was a need to visualize labour: this was integral to Josef Stalin's project of socialist construction. One result was the presentation of the worker as a very particular kind of hero. Such was the case for Viktor Kalmikov in *U.S.S.R. in Construction*.

¹⁷ See Charles Fremont, 'Les mouvements de l'ouvrier dans le travail professionnel', *Le Monde moderne*, 1: 2 (Feb 1895), 187-193.

¹⁸ The implications of this were drawn out in the time and motion studies of F. W. Taylor. See his *Scientific Management* (New York, 1911).

U.S.S.R. in Construction

The photo-essay dedicated to Kalmikov was entitled 'The Giant and the Builder'; it concerns his role in the building of the giant industrial complex of Magnitogorsk. The essay appeared in *U.S.S.R. in Construction* in the issue for January 1932. The journal had by this date established the practice of publishing thematic issues rather than gathering together diverse stories and images – as was the case for most photo-journals – and so the essay on Kalmikov is extensive; it unfolds over forty two pages and comprises eighty five photographs (this count includes all individual montaged elements). The colophon for the issue credits the photographs to M. Al'pert and M. Smolyan, with the cooperation of N. Vladimirtzev and G. Petrusov, and the composition and cover are credited to N. Troshin.¹⁹ 'The Giant and the Builder' is best understood as a development of an earlier photo-essay format on which Al'pert had collaborated, that of 'A Day in the Life of a Moscow Worker Family'. A brief account of the relationship between these essays will throw into relief the innovations of 'The Giant and the Builder'; yet in order to understand why innovations were desired the project of *U.S.S.R. in Construction* and its context first require some introduction.

U.S.S.R. in Construction was conceived in 1929 as a supplement to *Nashi dostizheniia* (*Our Achievements*), a literary journal edited by Maxim Gorky with the aim, announced in its title, of celebrating the various advances of socialist construction; the new photo-journal was to serve the same purpose.²⁰ 'Socialist construction' was Stalin's vision for the Soviet Union, for advance through collectivization and, above all, rapid industrialization as set out in the first Five-Year Plan.²¹ The plan was ratified in May 1929 but had gradually been elaborated through a series of debates – and

¹⁹ *U.S.S.R. in Construction*, 1 (Jan 1932), inside back cover. The journal was published in Russian, English, German and French editions. My citations are from the English edition; no translator is credited.

²⁰ By far the most extensive and detailed account of *U.S.S.R. in Construction* is Erika Maria Wolf, 'U.S.S.R. in Construction: From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice', PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1999. Any account of the journal will be indebted to Wolf's pioneering research and the present essay is certainly not an exception.

²¹ For a concise overview see E. H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin (1917-1929)* (London and Basingstoke, 1979). For one account of Stalin's role see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York and London, 1992).

manoeuvrings – following Stalin’s formulation of the possibility of ‘socialism in one country’. Stalin had first aired this conception in December 1924 but began to pursue its implications more vigorously over the course of 1925.²² In doing so, he cited Lenin’s view that only ‘when the country is electrified, only when industry, agriculture and transport have been put on the technical basis of large-scale industry, only then shall we be finally victorious’.²³ The vision of a self-sufficient Soviet Union required the transformation of industry and agriculture but the emphasis was firmly placed on the dynamic possibilities of the former. The New Economic Policy approved in March 1921 had favoured the conciliation of the peasantry in order to ensure a grain supply yet in the following years it became clear that the concession was made at the expense of the working class; Stalin now began to reverse these priorities. Accordingly, a three-year plan for the metal industry was announced in April 1925. Then at the Fourteenth Party Congress of December 1925 two of Stalin’s rivals, Grigori Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, suffered significant defeats and Stalin felt able to turn from the conciliation of the peasantry to a greater embrace of planning and industrialization.

In 1926 Lev Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev constituted themselves as a United Opposition yet Stalin consolidated his power over the course of the summer and autumn of 1927 and as a result the Fifteenth Party Congress of December 1927 ratified the decision to expel from the party the leaders of the opposition. Stalin then turned on his former ally, Nikolai Bukharin, denouncing the latter’s support for the peasantry and his cautious view of the appropriate pace of industrialization; Bukharin was now held to be guilty of a ‘right deviation’. If Stalin had felt any further reticence about adopting the policies of planning and industrialization which had been endorsed by Trotsky this circumspection was removed with the latter’s defeat.

²² See Josef Stalin, ‘The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists’, December 1924, *Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1953), 374-420, 387.

²³ Josef Stalin, ‘The Results of the Work of the Fourteenth Conference of the R.C.P. (B.)’, May 1925, *Works*, vol. 7 (Moscow, 1954), 90-134, 116. Stalin quotes V. I. Lenin, ‘Report on the Work of the Council of People’s Commissars’, December 1920, *Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow, 1966), 487-518, 516.

The war scare of 1927 and the poor harvests of 1927 and 1928 underlined the need both for greater self-sufficiency and for a transformation of agriculture. This lent force to the campaign for rapid industrialization and for a confrontation with the peasantry. Stalin was emphatic that his own plan was not simply to increase productivity – for this was also the aim of capitalist countries – instead socialist construction was ‘to guarantee the *systematic supremacy of the socialist sector of the national economy over the capitalist sector*’.²⁴ In a speech on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the Revolution, Stalin declared: ‘We are advancing full steam ahead along the path of industrialisation – to socialism, leaving behind the age-old “Russian” backwardness.’²⁵ And thus the Soviets ‘are now able to accomplish and even to exceed what was considered “fantasy” several years ago’.²⁶ Yet this was only the beginning and many obstacles had to be overcome. The collection of grain in 1928 had involved coercion yet the relative success of such methods was taken as evidence – by those in favour of such measures – that enforced collectivization of the peasantry could proceed. The resulting disorganization and disorder and the bad harvests of 1931 and 1932 were to lead to mass famine. Yet collectivization was a crucial stage in Stalin’s ‘revolution from above’. Alongside this, and increasingly dovetailed with it, was the campaign of industrialization.²⁷

The first Five-Year Plan projected a 236% increase in industrial output and an 110% increase in labour productivity.²⁸ Under any view, this was to put immense strains on the existing workforce, whilst also transforming it. Here the obstacles were more than technical, they concerned workers, techniques and technicians. The bourgeois origin of the latter, the ‘problem of the cadres’, was for Stalin ‘the key problem of socialist construction’.²⁹ Stalin called for such technicians to be repelled.

²⁴ Josef Stalin, ‘The Right Deviation in the C.P.S.U. (B.)’, April 1929, *Works*, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1955), 1-113, 84, emphasis retained.

²⁵ Josef Stalin, ‘A Year of Great Change: On the Occasion of the Twelfth Anniversary of the October Revolution’, November 1929, *Works*, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1955), 124-141, 141. This statement was used as an introit in the first issue of *U.S.S.R in Construction*.

²⁶ Stalin, ‘A Year’, 141.

²⁷ The term ‘dovetailed’ is Donald Filtzer’s: see *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization* (London, 1986) 33. The relationship between collectivization and industrialization is a theme of Carr’s *The Russian Revolution*.

²⁸ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin’s Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932* (Cambridge and New York, 1988) 22.

²⁹ Stalin, ‘A Year’, 131.

The 'Shakhty affair' of May-June 1928, which saw the trial of 53 engineers and technicians accused of conspiracy and sabotage, was to mobilize the masses against the forces of bourgeois counterrevolution and to prepare for a socialist offensive. Now new cadres of experts were to be recruited primarily from the working class.³⁰ At the same time, the steady expansion of the industrial workforce over the course of the second half of the 1920s created tensions between 'old' and 'new' workers; these were to be exacerbated as workers came under increasing pressure to meet the ambitious targets of the first plan.³¹ The party called repeatedly for discipline. Drawing on the mystique of war communism and an established language of militancy, in a speech of March 1927 Stalin reminded young workers of the 'sacrifices' required to secure the revolution, and appealed to them to remain 'in the front ranks' of the drive for rationalization.³² In July of the same year – in the midst of the war scare – the decoration 'Hero of Labour' was introduced.³³ Now the worker was to be re-made, in order that the work of building the Soviet Union could be advanced. Stalin's revolution was to complete that of 1917 and a new man was to be mobilized for this task.³⁴

Yet the question remained of how Stalin's transformation of labour was to be visualized.³⁵

And this was a pressing question; the need for Stalin's great offensive had to be communicated with

³⁰ See the chapters on class war and the making of a new elite in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca and London, 1992), 115-148 and 149-182.

³¹ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 87-107. Between December 1928 and May 1929 there was also a purge of the trade union leadership who had opposed the pace of industrialization. See Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, 24.

³² Josef Stalin, 'Speech delivered at the Fifth All-Union Conference of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League', March 1927, *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1954), 196-204, 200.

³³ On this conjunction see Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (London, 1999), 43.

³⁴ Whilst the 'new man' was presented as an ideal worker, there is debate about the composition and continuity of working-class identities in the Soviet Union after Stalin's rise. For arguments on the erosion of older identities see Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, and Gábor T. Rittersporn, 'From Working Class to Urban Laboring Mass: On Politics and Social Categories in the Formative Years of the Soviet System', in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 253-73.

³⁵ For a periodisation of the imagery of the Soviet worker see Evgeny Dobrenko, 'The Labour of Joy: Soviet Culture and the Production of Exultant Masses', in Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920-1970* (Milan, 2012), 135-45. Dobrenko's scheme is broadly in keeping with the account of the image of the Soviet worker provided in Victoria E. Bonnell, 'The Iconography of the Worker in Soviet Political Art', in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 341-75. From a study of political posters Bonnell argues that there is a decisive change of imagery in 1930, with the replacing of an older, traditional image of the worker as blacksmith: 359ff.

some urgency. The same party congress which expelled the leaders of the opposition also decreed that the system of political education and propaganda required reform.³⁶ In order to further this, a conference on agitation, propaganda and cultural work was convened in Moscow in May and June 1928. The creation of the new photo-journal needs to be placed in this context. *U.S.S.R. in Construction* was meant to offer a systematic representation of the new achievements of the Soviet Union yet, as Erika Wolf has shown, Gorky had reservations about this from the outset. Viewing the mock-up for the first issue at the end of the summer of 1929 Gorky asserted that in it 'the government's work is given an unorganized, fragmented appearance which cannot be adequately convincing to the observer-reader'.³⁷ And for a number of commentators these problems persisted. Reviewing the issues of the journal for 1931, what struck A. Narvskii was '[f]ragmentation, lack of connection, chance, lack of planning photo-information'.³⁸

The essay on Kalmikov was an attempt to resolve these problems, with the photographers taking as a point of departure a slightly earlier essay on the Moscow worker family, first published in September 1931.³⁹ The essay on the Filippov family was the work of Al'pert and Semen Tules and Arkadii Shaiket; it is an example of the 'day-in-the-life' format which had become popular during the 1920s.⁴⁰ In the essay, the different members of the Filippov family are presented over the course of a single day and this enables the photographers to show living and working conditions, and educational and leisure activities. Such a format imposed both a temporal and a biographical frame

For one focussed account of these changes see Rosalinde Sartorti, *Pressefotografie und Industrialisierung in der Sowjetunion: Die Pravda 1925-1933* (Berlin, 1981).

³⁶ See David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Political Indoctrination, and Stalinist Terror, 1928-1941* (New Haven and London, 2011), 21ff.

³⁷ Maxim Gorky, 'Zamechaniia k planu 1-go No. *Stroiki*, 1929', *M. Gor'kii I sovetskaia pechat'*, book 1, 294. Cited in Wolf, '*U.S.S.R. in Construction*', 44, Wolf's translation.

³⁸ A. Narvskii, 'Gigant I stroitel', *Zhurnalist*, 6 (1932), 8. Cited in Wolf, '*U.S.S.R. in Construction*', 133, Wolf's translation.

³⁹ The essay was first published in *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* and subsequently in a modified form in *Proletarskoe foto*. Both versions are reproduced in Jorge Ribalta (ed.), *The Worker Photography Movement (1926-1939): Essays and Documents* (Madrid, 2011). In the same volume see Erika Wolf, '"As at the Filippovs": The foreign origins of the Soviet narrative photographic essay', 124-130.

⁴⁰ Cinematic precedents would include *Berlin: Die Symphonie der Grosstadt* (1927) and *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930). A significant Russian example is Dziga Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (*Man with a Movie Camera*), (1929).

on the photographic material, lending unity to what could otherwise have been a series of disparate images. Yet the focus on a single day also imposed significant restrictions. The results of socialist construction could be shown but the process of socialist becoming could not. Thus the editors had recourse to frequent allusions to the past which had been swept away. Here is the caption to image seven:

The father, two sons, and daughter work at Red Proletarian on Malaia Kaluzhskaia. This was once "Bromley." If the former owner showed up, he would not recognize the factory. New enormous buildings, a training plant, have sprung up in place of the dirty, squat, "master's" barracks.⁴¹

Here the past may be gestured to but not represented. Transformations remain to be visualized.

Evidently, individual photographs are not well-suited to the task of presenting transformation. Most commonly, the temporal unit held to be significant in photography is the instant of exposure (Marey's experiments remaining significant exceptions). In this definition, the photograph removes a scene from the flux of time. Now, it may be contended that this is also true for many other types of image. However, it should also be acknowledged that the history of photography is in many ways the history of an apparatus which has been perfected to produce isolated 'instants'. Various innovations were directed to this end, from more reactive emulsions to the introduction of the shutter and release. Moreover, the tendency to view photographs as isolated instants removed from a larger whole has been encouraged by other kinds of technical innovation. These have adapted the photographic apparatus to make it conform to pre-existing pictorial conventions for the production of framed 'scenes'. Viewing photographs as framed or cropped is now habitual, and this was already the case for Al'pert, Tules and Shaiket, yet this was the result of the adaptation of the camera. For a round lens produces a circular image which shades

⁴¹ 'A Day in the Life of a Moscow Worker Family: "Den' iz zhizni moskovskoi rabochei sem'u", *Proletarskoe foto* 4 (December 1931): 21-44', in Ribalta, *The Worker Photography Movement*, 139-147, 140.

from a focussed area into darkness and this was 'corrected' by building cameras with a rectangular ground glass which isolated the central, focussed area.⁴² In turn, these adaptations, leading to the production of 'frozen', 'cropped' images, have enabled photography to meet various tasks of representation and the results have been so successful that they have entrenched a further view: that photographs are a distinct class of pictures with a special relationship with 'physical reality'. This was already articulated at the beginning of the history of photography by William Henry Fox Talbot, who held that – unlike earlier images which were made by the human hand – photographs emerged from the action of light on chemicals without human interference.⁴³ In this rather curious view of the medium, photographs are freed from being subject to the vagaries and frailties of artists and artisans; they become objective and therefore have a special value.⁴⁴

The significance of all this for the present argument is that the perceived virtue of the photographic capturing of reality could also be viewed as a vice. If individual photographs seemed to be only so many details, they might well convey a 'fragmented appearance'. This negative view of photography was frequently aired by Gorky and indeed by others in the Soviet Union. The image on the photographic plate was presented by Gorky and other writers of his stripe as a metaphor for 'the cramped and lifeless' representation of the worker which had to be rejected in order to realise a grander 'synthesis of the most characteristic manifestations of our reality'.⁴⁵

Al'pert and Shaiket were aware of these limitations of the individual photograph; what they sought was a form which would overcome it. In an essay of December 1931 in which they reflected on their experiences with the Filippovs, they observed:

⁴² For a powerful presentation of these issues see Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, 'Photography, Vision, and Representation', *Critical Inquiry*, 2: 1 (1975), 143-169, esp. 150ff.

⁴³ For a detailed account of all the issues involved in this view of the self-acting photographic apparatus see Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park, 2006), esp. 23-52.

⁴⁴ Again, for a properly critical assessment of this view see Snyder and Allen, 'Photography'.

⁴⁵ Maxim Gorky, 'On Literature and other things', *On Guard for the Soviet Union* (London, 1933), 42-53, 50. For a further discussion see Simon Dell, 'On the Metaphor and Practice of Photography: Socialist Realism, the Popular Front in France and the Dynamics of Cultural Unity', *History of Photography*, 25: 1 (Spring 2001), 52-60.

Curiously enough, to this day not a single publisher and not a single photo-reporter has put a giant under observation in order to genuinely show by way of a periodic series of photographs how it began to be built, the difficulties of construction, its growth, the fight for Promfinplan, and, finally, the collective, the leading victors in this war.⁴⁶

To state in December 1931 that this great work had not been undertaken was to announce a brief to be fulfilled. Of course, this was to happen the very next month, with the appearance of precisely such an essay on a 'giant'. What Al'pert and Shaiket wished to prepare was a reception of photographs as more than inert fragments. The individual photograph was to be superseded by the series and details were to be woven into a narrative. The photographers conclude: 'We should graphically show the ascendancy of the serial photograph over the individual photograph, even a well-executed one.'⁴⁷ In this manner, photographs will 'become living pages in the history of the giants'.⁴⁸

Yet at this date the appropriate narrative form for such histories was still under discussion. Stalin's revolution from above was accompanied by a cultural revolution and a new 'hard line' in literature was promoted by the proletarian writers' association, which was renamed Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei (RAPP) in 1928. However, official sponsorship of the cultural revolution ended in 1931 and in 1932 RAPP was dissolved, to be replaced by a new union of Soviet writers.⁴⁹ In 1934, at the first congress of this new organisation, Andrei Zhdanov endorsed the 'method of socialist realism'.⁵⁰ This method, he declared, was to be used to depict life 'not simply as

⁴⁶ Arkadii Shaiket and Maks Al'pert, 'How We Photographed the Filippovs: "Kak my snimali Filippovykh"', *Proletarskoe foto* 4 (December 1931): 46-47', in Ribalta, *The Worker Photography Movement*, 160-161, 160.

⁴⁷ Shaiket and Al'pert, 'How We Photographed the Filippovs', 161.

⁴⁸ Shaiket and Al'pert, 'How We Photographed the Filippovs', 160.

⁴⁹ For these developments in the broader context of the cultural revolution see Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 104-14 and 143-48. For the detail of literary debates at this moment see Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia: 1928-39* (Basingstoke, 1991), 143-204.

⁵⁰ Andrei Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature – the richest in ideas, the most advanced literature', in H. G. Scott (ed), *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (London, 1935), 15-24, 21.

“objective reality,” but to depict reality in its revolutionary development’.⁵¹ And Zhadanov made it clear that this development was being carried through by those workers dedicated to ‘the cause of socialist construction’ and here he referred directly to the workers at Magnitogorsk.⁵² Heroes of labour were also the heroes of a new literature. Zhadanov concluded: ‘Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream for our tomorrow is already being prepared for today by dint of our conscious planned work’.⁵³

It fell to Maxim Gorky to set out how the stories of these heroes were to be told, and how the passage from today to tomorrow was to be narrated. Speaking after Zhadanov, Gorky began by noting:

Historians of primitive culture have been completely silent regarding the unmistakeable signs of a materialist mode of thought inevitably precipitated by labour processes and by the sum of the facts of man’s social life. These signs have come down to us in the form of fairy tales and myths[.]⁵⁴

Gorky is emphatic. The ‘fundamental meaning’ of ancient tales should ‘be more profoundly understood’; he had in view precisely ‘the striving of working men of ancient times to ease their labour, raise productivity, [and] arm themselves against enemies’.⁵⁵ In this description, the fairy tale is understood to be a response to specific social conditions and to reveal a desire to overcome them; Gorky effectively posits fairy tales as anticipations of the Five-Year Plan. Indeed, even Hercules could now be understood as a ‘hero of labour’.⁵⁶ And after all, the Five-Year Plan was described by

⁵¹ Zhadanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, 21.

⁵² Zhadanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, 20.

⁵³ Zhadanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, 22.

⁵⁴ Maxim Gorky, ‘Soviet Literature’, *On Literature: Selected Articles*, trans. Julius Katzer and others (Moscow, 1939), 228-268, 229. Gorky’s position should not however be conflated with Zhadanov’s: see Kemp-Welch, *Stalin*, 172ff.

⁵⁵ Gorky, ‘Soviet Literature’, 230.

⁵⁶ Gorky, ‘Soviet Literature’, 231. Similar comments are made in Maxim Gorky, ‘On Literature and other things’, *On Guard for the Soviet Union* (London, 1933), 42-53, 51. Gorky’s lecture has been recognized as ‘the beginning of a new epoch in the study of folklore’: Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, trans.

Stalin and many others as a miraculous transformation of a backward country and as the fulfilment of the transformations wrought by the revolutions of 1917. In Stalin's own words, it was 'fantasy' made reality. Such miraculous transformations are the very stuff of the fairy tale.

The great Russian linguist Roman Jakobson offers a pertinent summary of the fairy-tale form:

The fairy tale fulfils the role of a social utopia. According to the definition of Boris Sokolov, it is a type of dream compensation. It is a dream about the conquest of nature – about a magic world where “at the pike's command, at my own request”, all the pails will go up the hill by themselves, the axes will chop wood all alone, the unharnessed sleighs will glide to the forest, and the firewood will poke itself into the stove. It is a dream about the triumph of the wretched, about the metamorphosis of a hind into the tsar.⁵⁷

These tales of triumph were given a new currency and a new character in the Soviet Union. A popular song of 1920, 'Ever Higher', has the refrain: 'We were born to make fairy tales come true'.⁵⁸ Ordinary citizens could now become heroes by devoting themselves to socialist construction; the record-breaking levels of productivity achieved first by 'shock-workers' and then by 'Stakhanovites' were exemplary.⁵⁹ The re-making of workers was to be narrated in Soviet versions of the fairy tale. Yet the Soviet Union was not to be presented as a world where work does itself; the task was to depict how the very status of work was undergoing transformation. Gorky is at pains to make as much clear in his own account of 'labour processes'. In his lecture he acknowledges the desire to

Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin and several others (Manchester, 1984), 157. It should also be acknowledged that the 'national' character of Russian fairy tales could commend them as Stalin was elaborating the policy of 'socialism in one country'; this dimension of the tale became increasingly important over the course of the 1930s. For an overview of the context for Soviet folklore see Felix J. Oinas, 'Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union', *Slavic Review*, 32: 1 (1973), 45-58.

⁵⁷ Roman Jakobson, 'On Russian Fairy Tales', in Aleksandr Afanas'ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York, 2006), 631-651, 650.

⁵⁸ Pavel German and Yuly Khait, 'Ever Higher', in James von Geldern and Richard Stites (eds), *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington, 1995), 257-58. Whilst penned in 1920, the editors note that the song was particularly popular with those young in the 1930s.

⁵⁹ For the fairy-tale dimensions of Stalin's revolution see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York and Oxford, 1999), 67-114.

build palaces 'overnight' but also wishes to maintain a materialist mode of thought and this leads him to assert that the 'normal process of working people's cultural development' is that which takes place 'when the hands teach the head'.⁶⁰ It follows that workers are not to abandon their work, for to sever labour from thought leads, ultimately, to bourgeois philistinism. The hind is not to become the tsar.

Yet nature remains to be conquered and the photo-essay 'The Giant and the Builder' is precisely concerned with this conquest. In a letter of 1931 to the workers of Magnitogorsk, Gorky described their role in the harnessing of natural resources and, in a strongly gendered account, he noted: 'It is as if the earth feels that a legitimate, real, and wise master has arisen, and opening her secret chests, displays her treasure before him.'⁶¹ Gorky chooses to describe the work at Magnitogorsk in the language of the fairy tale and what I now want to argue is that the photographs taken at the site were organised into such a tale. This was the appropriate narrative form for the history that the photographers of *U.S.S.R. in Construction* were tasked to convey. To demonstrate this I shall turn to Vladimir Propp's pioneering account of the morphology of the fairy tale and show that there is a high level of coherence between 'The Giant and the Builder' and the structure of the fairy tale as analysed by Propp.⁶² This structure generates the unity of the photo-essay, precisely that which was held to be lacking in earlier issues of *U.S.S.R. in Construction*. With this unity the struggle for socialist construction was recast.⁶³

⁶⁰ Gorky, 'Soviet Literature', 230 and 235.

⁶¹ Maxim Gorky, 'A Letter to the Workers of Magnitostroi', *Culture and the People* (New York, 1939), 129-137, 136. Magnitostroi was the name for the construction site. Needless to say, the history of the site is more complex than Gorky allows. For an early view see John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (London, 1942). For a detailed history see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley and London, 1995).

⁶² Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* was published in 1928 but the suggestion is not that editors and photographers took it as a model. By this date the formalist school to which Propp belonged was in crisis and this limited the impact of the work. See Pikova-Jakobson, 'Introduction to the First Edition', in Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, 1968), xix-xxii, xxi. Yet for an important application of Propp's method to the narrative forms Socialist Realism see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago and London, 1981).

⁶³ For pertinent discussion of the visual forms of socialist realism see Christina Kiaer, 'Fairy-tales of the Proletariat, or, Is Socialist Realism Kitsch?' in Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920-1970* (Milan 2012), 183-89. Kiaer's title is drawn from a statement of 1919 by the painter

The basic arc of 'The Giant and the Builder' is easily sketched. A young man, Viktor Kalmikov, responds to a call for volunteers to help in the grand project which is the construction of the Magnitogorsk open-hearth steel foundry, which will be the largest in the world. He leaves his village on the Ural steppes and travels to the construction site. He works first as a dam builder, then laying concrete, as an assistant moulder, and finally qualifies as a mechanic. In parallel with this training Kalmikov acquires a political education, becoming a party member and being elected to the presidium of the regional revolutionary-industrial conference. At the end of the tale Kalmikov is awarded the Order of the Red Labour Banner, the highest proletarian honour.

Kalmikov's tale differs from the essay on the Filippovs in being shaped around an individual biography and by being given a temporal extension, the eighteen months taken to make the Magnitogorsk foundry operational. Thus, there is a greater scope for action: now transformations may be set forth rather than merely alluded to.⁶⁴ In one respect, the organisation of material in 'The Giant and the Builder' conforms to a precedent already established in *U.S.S.R. in Construction*. The first issue of the photo-journal for 1931, dedicated to 'the Bolshevik press', had followed the production of a newspaper from the cellulose and paper combine, through printing, to distribution on the very widest scale, and a similar production process is traced in Kalmikov's tale.⁶⁵ Yet the latter is not merely a combination of a production arc and a biography. For these are descriptive modes and the innovation of 'The Giant and the Builder' is to recast such modes in a narrative form. The very title indicates this form, echoing as it does the simple conjunction of characters found in

Aleksandr Deineka: 'The pictures of our present time are a dream, a bright children's dream... You see these are fairy-tales, fairy-tales of the proletariat' (reprinted in V. P. Sysoev, *Aleksandr Deineka: Zhizn', iskusstvo, vremia*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1989), 71. For socialist realist painting and revolutionary romanticism see Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven and London, 1998), and especially 142-3.

⁶⁴ See Wolf, 'U.S.S.R. in Construction', 126ff. Wolf also establishes that the photographs were taken in October 1931 and discusses the implications of this. It should be added that a shift in the representation of the worker towards an emphasis on the individual hero began to take place over the course of 1931. See Bonnell, 'The Iconography of the Worker', 362ff. Such a shift would encourage the adoption of the fairy-tale form.

⁶⁵ *U.S.S.R. in Construction*, 1-2 (1931). The layout for this issue was also by Troshin.

many fairy-tale titles: 'The Wolf and the Goat', 'The Crane and the Heron', 'The Nobleman and the Peasant'.⁶⁶

'The Giant and the Builder' has a preface by the French Communist Paul Vaillant-Couturier which establishes the modern, Soviet version of fairy-tale land.

Magnetogorsk ... In vain you will try to locate it on even the most detailed map. All you will find is a mountain called Magnitnaya (Magnet Mountain) 617 meters above sea level, and on the right bank of a small river you will find an old Cossack village also named Magnitnaya. Maps have gone out of date. The socialistic world grows rapidly.⁶⁷

Thus the viewer and reader are introduced to a land of transformations, where fantasies become realities. The very landscape is to be transformed because of what lies within the mountain: three hundred million tonnes of ore. The first spread of the photo-essay, with the title of the tale, has a photograph of the steppes, showing the site of Magnetogorsk before construction began. The tale proper begins beneath this photograph with a brief description, with what Propp refers to as the temporal-spatial determination or 'the initial situation'.⁶⁸ The opening lines are: 'In the autumn of 1929 the Bolshevik builders arrived at the foot of the Magnet mountain.'⁶⁹ The implications of this sentence are quickly unfolded. An army of Soviet engineers, technicians and workers have arrived to begin construction, however their work will not be restricted to material and physical transformation:

⁶⁶ These examples are taken from the collection of tales made Afanas'ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*. This volume is the most comprehensive collection available in English.

⁶⁷ Paul Vaillant-Couturier, 'Magnetogorsk: The Giant Plant of the Second Metallurgical Base', *U.S.S.R. in Construction*, 1 (Jan 1932), unpaginated, ellipsis retained. Here I have preserved the variant spelling used in the photo-journal.

⁶⁸ Propp, *Morphology*, 24.

⁶⁹ *U.S.S.R in Construction*, 1-2 (Jan-Feb 1932). As this issue is unpaginated subsequent quotations from the text will not be referenced.

“Magnetostroi must become a training school” – said the party. In the process of socialistic construction a new man is being created, – a man of iron energy and socialistic habits, who embodies “Russian revolutionary enthusiasm and American efficiency.”

The site will be transformed and so will the cadres undertaking the work of transformation; these are to be the twinned accomplishments of socialist construction, surpassing the achievements of the capitalist world. All this will take place under the direction of the party.

After the establishing of this initial situation, the plot begins to unfold. The analysis of plots is central to Propp’s account. He is concerned with ‘the study of the tale *according to the functions of its dramatic personae*’, with function ‘*understood as an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action*’.⁷⁰ Propp’s first thesis is: ‘Functions of characters serve as stable, constant, elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.’⁷¹ From this arises the question: in what sequence are functions encountered? For Propp, the sequence is always identical, yet he immediately adds the qualification ‘that by no means do all tales give evidence of all functions’.⁷² What, then, is the sequence in ‘The Giant and the Builder’?

Tales begin either with an act of villainy or a lack and in this case, the lack is plainly stated in the second spread: ‘The giant is in need of water.’ Thus the first stage of construction at Magnitogorsk will be the building of a dam.

[Figure 3 here]

In Propp’s scheme, once the lack is made known there follows a moment of mediation, ‘the connective incident’, in this case the ‘call for help’.⁷³ ‘The significance of this moment lies in the fact

⁷⁰ Propp, *Morphology*, 20 and 21, emphases retained.

⁷¹ Propp, *Morphology*, 21.

⁷² Propp, *Morphology*, 22.

⁷³ Propp, *Morphology*, 36-7.

that the hero's departure is caused by it.⁷⁴ In Russian tales the call usually comes from the tsar but, needless to say, this figure has now been replaced by Soviet organization. The farms will send workers to the construction site and, in turn, steel from the plant will be used to supply tractors and combines to increase the productivity of the farms (this establishes a secondary lack, of materials and machines, one which was fully recognized by Stalin).⁷⁵ The photographs in the second spread follow this sequence closely. A pair of aerial photographs show the river to be dammed and the one of the villages to be swept away as the result of collectivization. This is the work to be undertaken for the party and the party's supervision of these sites is implied by the aerial views. The party has oversight. As much is confirmed by the photograph opposite these views: this is of the Soviet 'call'. A group of people stand with their backs to the camera, listening to a representative of the industrial enterprises. For the purposes of the Soviet narrative it is important that the hero emerges from the collective, and this is what this photograph establishes. Beneath this image is another, in which the hero makes his first appearance. In this photograph Kalmikov is shown in a train carriage, having departed from his village and his old life. He and his travelling companions are wearing *lapti*, bast-shoes which are a common symbol of poverty in Russian tales; yet these will soon be cast off.⁷⁶

Once the first three functions have been presented, a new character enters the tale. This is the donor or provider.⁷⁷ The donor either tests the hero or, in a weakened form of test, greets and interrogates him. In Kalmikov's tale the function takes this latter form.

[Figure 4 here]

Having arrived at Magnitogorsk, Kalmikov finds a city of white tents. A photograph shows him in one of these tents, encountering a representative of the Soviets, a woman described in the caption as 'a courteous maid'. Such polite donor-figures are frequently found in fairy tales; the hero has to

⁷⁴ Propp, *Morphology*, 37.

⁷⁵ On the new technical requirements of agriculture see, for example, Stalin, 'A Year', 134.

⁷⁶ See Jakobson, 'On Russian Fairy Tales', 649.

⁷⁷ Propp, *Morphology*, 39.

respond appropriately to the bestowed courtesy and if he does so receives a reward, which in this case is the fresh linen sheeting prominent in the foreground of the photograph. This gift is a preliminary to the next function, the hero's acquisition of 'a magical agent' to aid him in his task.⁷⁸ This agent appears in the next spread, alongside the already discussed photograph of Kalmikov digging.

[Figure 5 here]

The arrangement of limbs and implement in the photograph of Kalmikov is repeated on the opposite page in the configuration of an excavator. This is the magical agent offering a great multiplication of a single man's strength. Again, this a feature of many tales, where for example three hundred strong men might jump from an enchanted ring or, at the pike's command, a palace is built all at once.⁷⁹ Yet there are not enough excavators at Magnitogorsk, and so thousands of workers are required to dig the soil with Kalmikov, and they are also shown. They offer further help. This spread presents the magical agents central to the Soviet fairy tale: technology, in the form of the excavator, and the labouring collective. In the next spread this latter agent is given further characterisation. Class enemies are sabotaging the work on the dam, and so brigades of shock-workers organise sentries to guard the construction site. Kalmikov joins them. 'Thus, Kalmikov gradually developed his class consciousness not only in the battle against natural powers, but also in the class struggle.'

The result is the completion of the dam, which is shown in the next spread, in a large photograph taken over the wing of a Soviet aeroplane, with the initials C.C.C.P. prominent in the foreground. Kalmikov is the hero of the tale, yet he is supported by Soviet donors and the achievement is presented here as a Soviet one. The lack is liquidated. Yet this is not the end of the tale. Kalmikov's tale has a trebling of elements, similar to those tales where three heads have to be

⁷⁸ Propp, *Morphology*, 43.

⁷⁹ See 'The Enchanted Ring' and 'Emelya the Simpleton', Afanas'ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, 31-37 and 46-48.

cut off the dragon, or three obstacles overcome in the flight from the witch.⁸⁰ This repeated grouping of functions culminates first in the completion of 'Comsomol blast-furnace no. 2' and second with 'the completion of the first set of structures comprising the plant'. The next sequence, relating to the blast-furnace, begins after the spread showing the completed dam, and offers a reprise of earlier functions.

[Figure 6 here]

Now a new lack is made known: 'The country is in need of skilled workman. The proletariat is in need of its own technical intelligentsia'. In some important respects, this lack is distinct from the first one to be liquidated. Whilst Kalmikov's tale will unfold with further works of construction, repeating the achievement of the dam-building, the stated need for a trained cadre shifts the emphasis from the transformation of the site to the transformation of the hero. This shift has been prepared, however, as the transformation of the hero is adumbrated in the initial situation, where both the giant and the builder are presented as the products of what is described as 'socialistic construction'. Yet the shift at this point in the tale is significant and may be taken as a Soviet innovation. For whilst in traditional tales the status of the hero is transformed, the hero himself is not; the simpleton may come to marry the princess and live in a palace, but he will remain a simpleton. The development of character, and all that is attendant on it, is the property of the novel. By contrast, the hero in the tale ordinarily 'loses all significance' once the magical agent is acquired, for the hero does nothing and the helper 'accomplishes everything'.⁸¹ However, in 'The Giant and the Builder', Kalmikov is presented as re-moulding himself. He is now shown learning to read and write and the acquisition of literacy will enable him to advance his political knowledge (and for the first time the viewer can see that he has shed his *lapti* for leather shoes). Once all this has

⁸⁰ For trebling, see Propp, *Morphology*, 74ff. In an appendix Propp offers a list of abbreviations for the functions which allows any tale to be rendered as a formula. Accordingly, 'The Giant and the Builder' could be represented thus: $\alpha a^6 B^1 C \uparrow D^2 E^2 F^9 K^4 D^2 E^2 F^9 K^4 D^2 E^2 F^9 K^4 T^3 W^*$. This at least has the virtue of making clear the trebling of functions DEF (First function of the donor/Reaction of the hero/Acquisition of a magical agent). Propp comments that these functions 'form something of a whole': Propp, *Morphology*, 65.

⁸¹ Propp, *Morphology*, 50.

been presented, there is a further encounter with donors and the status of the donors as party members is now made explicit. A photograph shows Kalmikov in a tent similar to the one in which he met the courteous maid. He is reclining on a bed with linen sheeting; the wooden 'satchel' with which he arrived is visible at the foot of the bed. Behind him is a portrait of Stalin. He is talking to Zakharov, 'the party propagandist'. So the reprising of the earlier function is also an advance; Kalmikov encounters those who might be described as more senior donors, offering a more powerful form of magic, that which is bestowed on party members. Now Kalmikov becomes the leader of a brigade of shock-workers; he enforces discipline and increases efficiency and this is shown in a photograph of boards displaying productivity rates. Thus, to a certain extent, Kalmikov as hero begins to take on attributes of the donors and helpers.⁸² At this point Kalmikov's development is once again paired with that of the giant. 'As the structures continue to rise, so does Kalmikov continue to advance.'

The next spread shows the digging of the foundations of the blast furnace. And following this is a spread showing Kalmikov keeping pace with construction; he is now working as an assistant moulder and has been admitted to the nucleus of the party. Next, a series of three spreads showing the vast scale of construction culminates with the completed furnace and a series of portraits of shock-workers.

The third and final reprise begins with a new group of donors. These include Karklin, the secretary of the district party committee, Zimichev, chairman of the trade-union committee, and Gugel, director of construction works. The latter is in almost daily contact with the Supreme Economic Council in Moscow. And...

⁸² Such transferences do occur in traditional tales yet Propp understands this as a distribution of functions, which is distinct from character development. See Propp, *Morphology*, 82-3. Development through education was a component of the Stalinist advance; for details of how this was negotiated at Magnitogorsk see the second part of Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, esp. 180-92 and 217-30.

... meanwhile, Victor Klamikov, the fitter, continues to advance. The Coke Chemical Plant at Magnetogorsk is nearing completion. From an object of construction it is being converted into an active enterprise. Kalmikov did not want to lag behind. He felt quite fit for further work. Wishing to remain in the plant he comes for advice to the secretary of the party committee – comrade Scherinov.

So Scherinov replaces Zakharov and Kalmikov moves closer to the central figures of authority.

[Figure 7 here]

A photograph included at this point shows Kalmikov studying not basic grammar but more advanced forms of mathematics. Opposite this is the final image of Kalmikov receiving instruction, however not in the classroom but on site with a skilled mechanic. Here he takes on further attributes of the magic helpers.

Following this spread there is a further Soviet innovation. A photograph shows Kalmikov and one Emilia Bakke registering their marriage. This is a violation of the usual fairy-tale sequence of actions, for the wedding is to be placed at the very end, and this tale is not yet over. There are, I think, two reasons for the innovation. The first is that the pleasures of family life had a much diminished role at this moment in the history of the Soviet Union, being viewed at least in principle as mere relics of a vanished world of the bourgeoisie. (For example, of the forty four photographs comprising the essay on the Filippovs' day, only one, of the breakfast table, shows the family gathered together.) Thus the traditional denouement of the tale is no longer appropriate. The second reason concerns the role of the hero in relation to the collective; this I shall return to in due course.

Whilst the introduction of the bride is, strictly, misplaced, it does nevertheless signal that the tale is drawing to a close. As much is confirmed by the next spread.

[Figure 8 here]

In this there are two aerial views of the site nearing completion: 'The open-heart furnace forge has raised its chimney stalks [*sic*]. The electric station is shedding its scaffolding.' As in earlier spreads, the aerial views present the overview of the party, the surveying of the work in progress. Opposite these images is a photograph of Kalmikov carefully adjusting a tie with the aid of a mirror propped on a table. The caption makes explicit the link between these seemingly disparate images: 'Shock-work and socialist competition are making headway. The struggle to fulfil comrade Stalin's six conditions is raising the productivity of labor [...] For his exemplary shock-work Viktor Kalmikov was presented with a suit of clothes as a premium.' One of the final functions in the tale is the transfiguration of the victorious hero, and here this is achieved in the traditional manner, when the 'hero puts on new garments'.⁸³ The transformation begun with the discarding of the *lapti* is completed.

Following this is the apotheosis of the hero. Kalmikov is shown on the dais of the presidium of the revolutionary-industrial conference. He now shares the stage with Comrade Gugel. And thus he may be held to have assumed further attributes of the donors, such is the fruit of his political education. In the final spread Kalmikov's figure is presented against a white ground and set off against the report of the award of the Order of the Reb Labour Banner. For a moment the heroic figure is isolated.

[Figure 9 here]

Yet opposite is a photograph of 'representatives of national minorities' and a final aerial view, of an ensemble of buildings on a collective farm, the latter recalling the photograph of the backward peasant village at the beginning of the tale. Together these images place the struggles at Magnitogorsk in the larger context of collectivization and the Five-Year Plan; the role of the collective is then re-asserted in a final montage.

⁸³ Propp, *Morphology*, 63.

[Figure 9 here]

In this montage, a portrait of Kalmikov is set in the bottom-right corner of a larger view down onto a crowd massed for a demonstration, some carrying the requisite banners and flags. If throughout the tale Kalmikov has been the hero, he has also been a representative of the collective. And so it is necessary to reinsert him into this collective. This process had already been given a narrative form in *Cement*, Fyodor Gladkov's novel of 1925. This novel, which provided one of the blueprints for Socialist Realism, tells a similar story to that of Magnitogorsk. Gladkov's story concerns the reconstruction of a plant after the civil war and it has a similar ending to Kalmikov's tale. The chief protagonist of the novel, Gleb Chumalov, has been a pivotal figure in the work of reconstruction and as such is called on to address a huge crowd at the re-opening of the plant. He stands on a trelliswork tower with members of the plant committee: 'But Gleb stood alone, looking at those numberless crowds of people that surged, swirled, blossomed like fields of sunflowers down below, as far as the eye could see.'⁸⁴ The juxtaposition here is analogous to that in the final montage: for a moment the heroic figure is isolated, above the crowd. Yet this is only for a moment. Standing before the masses, Gleb has to be prompted to speak:

Why speak when it was all clear without words? He needed nothing. What life had he? – it was a mere speck of dust in this ocean of human life. Why speak at a time when one's tongue, one's voice were unnecessary? He had not words, no life, apart from this mass of humanity [...] "We're doing no-one a favour, comrades, when we work our fingers to the bone to create our new proletarian economy. It's our choice, our battle. We're all in it, all of us, one for all. If I'm a hero, then so is everyone ..."85

⁸⁴ Fyodor Gladkov, *Cement*, trans. Liv Tadge (Moscow, 1981), 394.

⁸⁵ Gladkov, *Cement*, 405, ellipses added. See the Proppian analysis of this finale in Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 259-60.

The Soviet hero has his place with the masses; in the oceanic moment he is one with the collective.

So it is for Kalmikov. The final montage is a Soviet denouement. In effect, this montage replaces the wedding scene; it is Kalmikov's consummation.

The final caption states:

Many thousands have followed the same course that Viktor Kalmikov has taken.

A new man makes his appearance on the arena of history.

Socialist construction makes this new man.

The tale ends.

Conclusion

In 1918, in a report on the progress of the civil war, Lenin likened the idea of an imminent 'field revolution on a world-wide scale' to a very beautiful fairy tale.⁸⁶ However, he added that the revolution would come, and that there is 'an element of reality in every fairy tale'.⁸⁷ This is the case for Kalmikov's tale. Viktor Kalmikov was an historical figure and he did have a career within the party, holding various positions including Secretary of the Komsomol (Communist Youth Organisation) of the coke plant at Magnitogorsk.⁸⁸ Yet as Wolf has established, whilst the image of Kalmikov as a model shock-worker endured, the historical figure was expelled from the party during Stalin's purge of the Komsomol in 1937. Kalmikov was executed on 28 July 1938, having been

⁸⁶ V. I. Lenin, 'Political Report of the Central Committee: Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (B.)', 7 March 1918, *Collected Works*, vol. 27, trans. Clemens Dutt (Moscow, 1965), 87-109, 102.

⁸⁷ Lenin, 'Political Report', 102.

⁸⁸ Wolf, '*U.S.S.R. in Construction*', 161.

charged with belonging to a counter-revolutionary organization, although the fact of his murder was concealed from his wife.⁸⁹ He was one of the many victims of Stalin's dictatorship.

There is then a cleavage between Kalmikov's image and his biography. The final question is: how is this cleavage to be understood? This is a perennial question and one which is particularly insistent in the history of photography because, as noted above, it is often taken to be in the nature of the photograph to have a special relationship with 'physical reality'. Many attempts to address the question have resolved it by establishing what seem to me problematic hierarchies. One group of solutions counterpose 'illusion' and reality; such accounts tend towards moral judgement by ascribing an agency of dubious worth to the producer and assuming an intent to deceive. A second group of solutions present a relation between image and prototype which is at once causal and neutral; in these accounts the prototype motivates the character of image and the latter becomes a more or less faithful transcription of the former. Despite their obvious divergence, what these two types of account share is an impulse to remove agency from the image and locate it elsewhere, in either producer or prototype. The impulse does not contribute much to a critical account of the operation of imagery. For there is not much point in studying photographs if the only exercise involved is that of judging their distance or otherwise from a reality, however brutal that reality may be. Such studies either seek to unmask an already established malign intent or lapse into the alternative tautology of greeting an accurate representation of facts. My purpose in analysing 'The Giant and the Builder' as a fairy tale has been otherwise. The aim has not been to establish the work as a fiction but rather to understand its structure. It is therefore appropriate to conclude by returning to Propp's fundamental components of the tale: the distribution of functions and their significance for the course of the action.

⁸⁹ Wolf, *'U.S.S.R. in Construction'*, 162-163. Wolf includes in an appendix the letter of 21 October 1992 to Emilia Bakke from the Ministry of Security in which the details of Kalmikov's case are disclosed: Appendix F, 415.

The Soviet fairy tale was the most effective form in which to present the figure of Kalmikov because its structure bound individual photographs into a narrative of transformation. Kalmikov in his becoming could not be represented in a single image but this process could be visualized across the photographic sequence. And what enabled this was the distribution of functions in the Soviet fairy tale. As the tale unfolds, Kalmikov's physical exertions are gradually replaced with the exercise of skills. Thanks to his donors, he is given power over technology. And, in turn, this power is put to work to build the giant, so that soon enough the giant will be able to go to work and produce the material for more machines, the tractors and combines needed on the collective farms. The giant will take over from the builder; this is another modern version of the fantasy of freedom from labour. In *U.S.S.R in Construction* the abstraction of labour is not so much overcome as displaced. Machines, after all, are 'absolutely indifferent' to their tasks, and the power generated by a turbine may in principle be directed to any end, and be 'capable of all specificities'.⁹⁰ Yet this is only one aspect of the Soviet account, for the machine is put in the service not of the capitalist but of the worker. It is to be in the service of Kalmikov and his comrades. The Soviet fairy tale offers a different dream of the conquest of nature, because the conquest of nature is not achieved by 'the power of man over man', as Gorky has it in his account of Soviet literature.⁹¹ For in 'our country any man is the collaborator of his fellow-men, their friend and comrade-in-arms, their teacher, but never lord over their minds and wills'.⁹² And yet in the end, whilst physical exertion and the abstraction of labour have been displaced, Kalmikov remains a worker, and he is returned to his place in the collective. For the task of socialist construction is ongoing. In this, it may be compared to the civilizing mission of colonial powers; colonizers may claim to liberate the colonized from their backward condition but freedom is cast to a horizon. It is something to work toward and in the meantime the relation between colonizer and colonized remains unequal.⁹³ Capitalism had been

⁹⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 296.

⁹¹ Gorky, 'Soviet Literature', 231.

⁹² Gorky, 'Soviet Literature', 231.

⁹³ For discussion of Gorky's *Our Achievements* as presenting a 'civilizing mission' see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 68.

displaced in the Soviet Union of the 1930s but unequal relations and exploitation remained.

Alienation was not overcome. Stalin maintained control of the party and was able to impose collectivization and, subsequently, the violence of the Terror.

The ongoing work of socialist construction was held to require direction; the state could not wither away yet and so the role of the party remained central. This is acknowledged in the course of action of 'The Giant and the Builder', and also, for that matter, in *Cement*. Both narratives conclude not with rest but by anticipating further work. Chumalov's plant is about to begin production and much remains to be done at Magnitogorsk to make the foundry fully operational. Workers are still needed, and they still need the party. The final montage in 'The Giant and the Builder' presents this. Kalmikov is, of course, by this stage easily recognized and so he is acknowledged as an individual. He is after all the hero of the tale; this is what has been narrated. Nevertheless, he is also positioned in such a way as to make him an exemplary figure within the collective. (In this montage it would not be appropriate for him to be wearing a tie and indeed he is not.) He is one, but one amongst the many. This collective is photographed from above and over the course of the tale it has been established that this is the viewpoint of the party. This viewpoint need not be interpreted in too literal a sense; it is the oversight which is important. The larger issue here again concerns functions; Kalmikov may have acquired new skills but he has not acquired the status of a donor. As a shock-worker he may be a hero but in this role he will necessarily remain in the service of Stalin's party, and, ultimately, be subject to it.